



Midterm Report

Submitted by
Cuesta College
P.O. Box 8016
San Luis Obispo, CA 93403-8106

to

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

October 2024


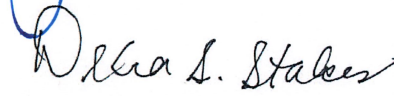
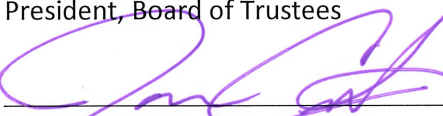
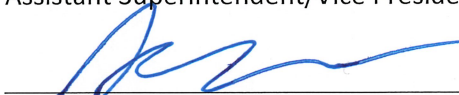
Certification

To: Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges,
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

From: Jill Stearns, Ph.D.
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This Midterm Report is submitted to the ACCJC for the purpose of highlighting recent improvements and innovations at Cuesta College since the last comprehensive peer review. The report accurately reflects the nature and substance of this institution – as well as the institution’s best efforts to align with the ACCJC Standards – and was developed with appropriate participation and review by the campus community.

Signatures:

 _____ Jill Stearns, Ph.D. Superintendent/Vice President	October 15, 2024 Date
 _____ Debra Stakes, Ph.D. President, Board of Trustees	October 15, 2024 Date
 _____ Jason Curtis, Ph.D. Assistant Superintendent/Vice President, Instruction, ALO	October 15, 2024 Date
 _____ Alexandra Kahane, Ph.D. President, Academic Senate	October 15, 2024 Date

A. Reflections on Continuous Improvement Since Last Comprehensive Review

Provide brief responses to the prompts below, referring to the Peer Review Team Report for the last comprehensive peer review. Suggested length for Section A is 3 pages.

- 1. Briefly describe major improvements or innovations since the time of the last comprehensive peer review, focusing on areas where your institution is excelling or showing significant improvement with regard to equitable student outcomes, educational quality, and/or mission fulfillment.**

Cuesta College has made strides in enhancing student outcomes and aligning its practices with its mission of transforming a diverse community of learners. These advancements, described below, are evident in several key initiatives designed to promote a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Caring Campus

Cuesta College has become a Caring Campus. Caring Campus is based on behavioral changes at an institutional level to create a college environment that increases students' sense of belonging and connectedness, and in turn, persistence and completion. The transformation for the Caring Campus Initiative emphasizes the principle of "being student-centered" in day-to-day student services and activities. There are five behavioral commitments that the college has made: the Ten-Foot Rule, Use of Nametags, Cross-Departmental Awareness, Warm Referrals, and First Week Greetings. These commitments have been implemented on both our physical campuses and virtually. In order to maintain momentum, many governance committee meetings feature an agenda item where members are asked to share how and what they have implemented or done in their respective area that is aligned with the Caring Campus behavioral commitments.

Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Academy on Curriculum and Teaching

The JEDI Academy on Curriculum and Teaching provides a cohort of faculty the opportunity to join in a collaborative review and redesign of their teaching practices and materials with an emphasis on centering equity. Faculty work individually (or as part of a team) on one course that they wish to (re)design from an equity perspective. While the JEDI Academy is course-based, the focus on equity and teaching principles is widely applicable to other types of student interaction. Service faculty have been encouraged to participate. Throughout the Academy, there is a focus on building community, developing cultural responsiveness, equity mindedness, anti-bias and anti-racist pedagogy, and creating engaging and culturally relevant materials that reflect educational quality. JEDI sessions provide training in developing equitable practices in teaching (both online and face-to-face) and in designing Canvas sites, syllabi, assignments, and grading. Four faculty cohorts (91 participants) have completed JEDI Academy. The 2024 and 2025 JEDI cohorts are supported by a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy & Practices Innovative Best Practices Grant (CRPP IBP Grant) awarded by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO).

Guided Pathways

Cuesta College has continued its work toward equitable student outcomes by embracing Guided Pathways as a framework for ensuring equity and eliminating institutional barriers that may have

disproportionate negative impact on students of color and low-income students. Cuesta College was a California Guided Pathways Phase Two (CAGP 2.0) institution and attended six institutes between 2020 and 2024 to help evolve the student experience. During this time, the college has fully implemented a Program Mapper and major/career exploration, redesigned our student onboarding process, and adopted equity-minded student-friendly communications. Student Success Teams within each Area of Study were launched in Fall 2022, and they have played an important role in cultivating student engagement and belonging, and encouraging student persistence. The college has created structures and invested in technology to allow for supportive case management intervention and support. Overall, a cultural shift is in progress to use the student voice to drive programs and services, to respond to student needs instead of creating practices based on assumptions, and to recognize the need for continued input from students to assess how we can best support them.

2. Briefly describe actions taken in response to any recommendations for improving institutional effectiveness or feedback noted in the Peer Review Team Report for the last comprehensive peer review.

Cuesta College did not receive any recommendations or feedback for improving institutional effectiveness in the Peer Review Team Report for the last comprehensive peer review. However, Cuesta College recognizes the importance of continuous self-assessment and improvement. In that spirit, Cuesta College has self-identified that our learning outcomes structures could be stronger, and that our governance structure was due for review. This initiated work in the following two areas:

General Education Learning Outcomes (GELOs) and Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At Cuesta College, the Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) “are the expected student learning outcomes for District students either graduating with A.A. or A.S. degrees, or who will transfer to a four-year college or university. These students will be able to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes contained within all six areas, based on General Education and discipline-specific courses at the lower division level.”

The current iteration of ILOs was approved by the Academic Senate in March 2012. Over the years, Cuesta College has grown as an institution. To better support the college’s Mission, Vision, and Values, it was determined that the college needed to revisit and revise the ILOs. The Institutional Learning Outcomes Revision Project (ILORP) was launched in Spring 2023 with a goal of completion at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year.

Although GELOs had also been adopted in 2012, the College considered the ILO statements to encompass the outcomes in the General Education program. Because of that, there were no structures in place to directly (and independently) assess the GELOs. To correct this, the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) of General Education courses are being mapped to the GELOs. This work is ongoing and once complete will allow the direct assessment of our GELOs.

Implementing both changes will allow for better assessment of outcomes and support of Cuesta College’s Mission, Vision, and Values.

Governance Structure Review

For several years, the College’s governance has been guided by its Participatory Governance Handbook

and Integrated Planning Manual, which, respectively, define the roles and responsibilities of the college's committees and stakeholder groups and ensure the timely completion of required plans. These guides and their related processes have worked as planned, as the college has had its accreditation status affirmed without issue in recent cycles.

Over the years, though, some stakeholders have raised concerns over the sustainability of the structures and processes. The cycle of planning is intense and requires an exceptional amount of administrative time and attention to maintain alignment with the established schedules. Further, the integrated planning process was developed in an earlier era prior to many changes at the state level, such as the CCCCO's Vision for Success, the Strong Workforce Program, the Student Centered Funding Formula (SCFF), and an increasing emphasis on equity of outcomes and completion. While the planning process helped to ensure compliance with past ACCJC standards, it also prioritizes process over outcomes.

In Fall 2020, following Cuesta College's most recent ACCJC Peer Review Team visit, the College applied for a Partnership Resource Team (PRT) under the CCCCO's Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI). An Area of Focus for the College was to conduct a comprehensive review of the participatory governance structure and committees. Using the feedback from the PRT visit, the College has continued to revise committee compositions and structure, such as the move to combine the Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness Committees in 2023. The College also established a new committee, the Policy and Procedure Review Committee, to ensure that Board Policies and Administrative Procedures were being reviewed on a regular cycle or in response to new State regulations (e.g., California Title 5).

3. How are the actions described above helping your institution deepen its practices for continuous improvement and transformation in relation to the 2024 Accreditation Standards?

Continuous self-assessment and improvement are essential for enabling Cuesta College to achieve equitable student outcomes and provide our evolving student population with the highest quality education. The College's most-recent Institutional Self Evaluation Report (ISER) was prepared in accordance with the 2014 standards, but as we look forwards to the 2024 standards, we note the greater emphasis on outcomes, innovations, and improvement to achieve those goals, rather than on the documentation of processes. This change in emphasis necessitates a change in perspective and realignment of the college's practices to become more outcomes-based.

As college planning processes are at least partially predicated on ensuring compliance with ACCJC standards, the change in standards, combined with the college's determination that our governance structure was due for review, initiated action. The Planning and Budget Committee (PBC) recommended that the Superintendent/President designate a task force to review college planning and governance processes and to make recommendations for revisions.

In addition to reviewing our governance structure, self-assessment also revealed that our Mission, Vision, and Values (MVV) were in need of revision. The previous assessment of the MVV had occurred in 2019, at which time the college decided to continue with the version adopted in 2016; a revision was needed to reflect the changes arising during the pandemic, the commitment to social justice and equity, and the college's status as a Hispanic Service Institution (HSI). The Vice President of Instruction launched the review of Cuesta's Mission, Vision and Values according to the process spelled out in the

Integrated Planning Manual. That process involved the formation of an ad hoc group to craft a feedback process and forward recommendations to College Council, Academic Senate, and the Superintendent/President. For this revision, the College worked with a consultant to facilitate the feedback process, which consisted of interviews with specific stakeholder groups, a college-wide survey conducted in early spring 2023, and a town hall-style meeting in March 2023. Based on the feedback, a new MVV draft was created, recommended through the governance process, and approved by the Board of Trustees at its meeting in June 2024.

B. Reflections on Institution-Set Standards and Other Metrics of Student Achievement

Provide a brief response to each question below, referring to Standards 1.3 and 2.9 for additional context. You may insert graphs, charts, or other similar visuals as needed to support your narrative. Suggested length for Section B (not counting any visuals) is 3 pages.

- 1. Review the most recent ACCJC Annual Report and other meaningful metrics of student achievement. Has the institution met its floor standards? Exceeded its stretch goals? Describe any patterns or trends you see in performance against your institution-set standards and other metrics of student achievement.**

In the most recent year, and over the last five years, the institution has exceeded its floor institution-set standards across all relevant metrics of student achievement. In general, the data show increasing trends of student achievement, particularly post-pandemic (for most metrics, the pandemic years represented the nadir of performance over the last five years). For example, successful course completion has met the Institution-Set Standard of Achievement of 74.0% success rate in each of the past 3 years.

Cohort	Percent of Students that Successfully Completed Courses
2020-2021	75.5%
2021-2022	74.7%
2022-2023	75.6%

Two noteworthy areas where trends are very positive include both certificate and degree completion. In both cases, the increases (outperforming stretch goals in both cases) can be attributed largely to auto-awarding of degrees and certificates. In addition, over the last five years, the institution experienced significant gains in the completion of math and English in the first year. While this can be attributed primarily to changes in legislation in California (i.e., AB 705, AB 1705, etc.), both math and English faculty have engaged in student-centered pedagogical adjustments as well as the creation of corequisite support courses.

Another bright spot to note is the institution's performance vis-a-vis its institution-set standard regarding the examination pass rate for Registered Nurses. The institution has consistently exceeded both its standard and stretch goal. For the past two years, the NCLEX-RN pass rate was 100% for first-time takers even though this standardized test changed to a new format.

- 2. When you disaggregate the data for the institution-set standards and other meaningful metrics of student achievement, what do you see related to equitable student achievement outcomes (i.e., equity gaps)? What patterns or trends excite you? What patterns or trends concern you?**

Table 1 below portrays our disproportionately impacted (DI) student groups across the various student achievement metrics identified in our 2022-2025 Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) Plan. In particular, the outcomes for First Generation students (disproportionately impacted across four of the five metrics) and Black/African American students (disproportionately impacted across three of the

five metrics) are of concern to the institution. In fact, the institution is actively addressing every DI group across any of the five student achievement metrics. Table 2 quantifies the additional number of students needed to close equity gaps; these numbers are also translated into a percent change needed to close the equity gaps. Other than those metrics defined and tracked in the SEA Plan, the college has not disaggregated the data for institution-set standards.

Table 1

Metrics and Main Student Population(s) Experiencing Disproportionate Impact

Metric	Student Group				
	Female	Black/African American	Latinx/Hispanic	Current/Former Foster Youth	First-Generation
Successful Enrollment	X				
Completion of Transfer Level Math & English		X	X		X
Persistence Primary to Secondary Term		X		X	X
Transfer within 3 Years		X	X		X
Vision Goal Completion				X	X

Table 2

Student Population(s) Experiencing Disproportionate Impact and Target Outcomes

Student Group	Metric	Target Outcome by 2024-2025
Female	Successful Enrollment	Increase by 13.9% (i.e., 112) the successful first year enrollment
	Completion of Transfer Level Math & English	Increase by 1100% (i.e., 11) the completion of transfer level math and English
Black/African American	Persistence Primary to Secondary Term	Increase by 23.7% (i.e., 9) the persistence from primary term to secondary term
	Transfer within 3 years	Increase by 125% (i.e., 5) the transfer to a four-year institution within three years
Latinx/Hispanic	Completion of Transfer Level Math & English	Increase by 53.5% (i.e., 46) the completion of transfer level math and English
	Transfer within 3 years	Increase by 29.1% (i.e., 25) the transfer to a four-year institution within three years
Current or Former Foster Youth	Persistence Primary to Secondary Term	Increase by 26.8% (i.e., 11) the persistence from primary term to secondary term
	Vision Goal Completion	Increase by 266.7% (i.e., 8) the Vision for Success definition of completion within three years
First-Generation	Completion of Transfer Level Math & English	Increase by 114.8% (i.e., 62) the completion of transfer level math and English
	Persistence Primary to Secondary Term	Increase by 13.5% (i.e., 67) the persistence from primary term to secondary term
	Transfer within 3 years	Increase by 173.3% (i.e., 78) the transfer to a four-year institution within three years
	Vision Goal Completion	Increase by 74.2% (i.e., 49) the Vision for Success definition of completion within three years

3. What actions has your institution taken/is your institution taking in response to the patterns and trends discussed above? How will you monitor the results of these actions in order to inform future improvements and innovations in support of equitable student achievement?

Cuesta College has continued to make the collection and analysis of data a priority in the effort to ensure that we are knowledgeable about equitable student achievement outcomes and respond with relevant interventions to improve those outcomes. Various data dashboards and reports have been a primary method of tracking performance gaps.

Cuesta has also devoted resources to the increased professional development effort to ensure that faculty are culturally responsive in their interactions with students. This has taken many forms as

there have been many training on topics such as culturally responsive teaching, implicit bias, and equity-focused strategies. For example, faculty created the Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Academy on Curriculum and Teaching to help review and redesign courses with an emphasis on centering equity. To monitor the results of these actions, there are variety of mechanisms including collecting feedback from participants, observation of teaching practices, and reviewing student outcome data from these changes.

Other actions to promote equitable outcomes include intentional targeted interventions with students. The implementation of mentoring and support programs to address the unique needs of minoritized groups has been an important practice. Among some of those targeted interventions have been the CARE (Cuesta Academic Retention and Engagement) calls, creation of support centers including the Student Success Center, the Monarch Dream Center for undocumented students, MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, & Science Achievement), C6 LSAMP (California Central Coast Community College Collaborative Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation), NextUP/Foster Youth Program, and several others. To assess the results of these actions, Cuesta has taken steps to track participation rates, assess effectiveness of the centers through surveys, and monitor changes in students' academic performance.

C. Reflections on Assessments of Student Learning

Provide a brief response to each question below, referring to Standards 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, and 2.9 for additional context. You may insert graphs, charts, or other similar visuals as needed to support your narrative. Suggested length for Section C (not counting any visuals) is 3 pages.

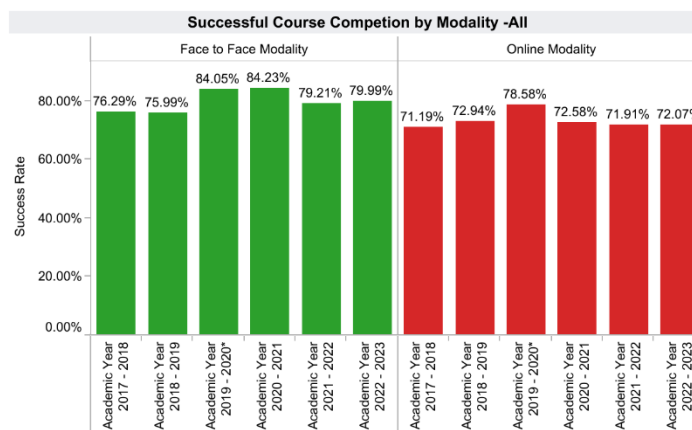
- 1. Review the results of learning outcomes assessment. Describe any patterns or trends related to attainment of learning outcomes observable in these data that may be relevant as you implement improvements and innovations in the design and delivery of academic programs?**

The results for learning outcome (LO) assessment since Cuesta College’s accreditation reaffirmation are difficult to interpret for several reasons that all stem from the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the workload of converting content to a fully online modality, some faculty did not formally collect learning outcome data on the schedule they usually follow. Collection and entry of student learning outcome (SLO) assessment data is vital, as Cuesta’s PLO (program learning outcomes) and ILO (institutional learning outcomes) data are based on data from the SLOs mapped onto these comprehensive outcomes – without as much SLO data, our PLO and ILO data is less robust.

Additionally, there is a question of how useful the data may be, considering those courses were taught in an entirely new format for a limited time (i.e., one or two cycles of SLO assessment).

Student success data and qualitative data of their experience were heavily relied upon during the pandemic to foster improvement and innovation. It is worth noting that student success was very high for the 2019-2020 academic year. The Cuesta College Academic Senate voted to implement a “compassionate excused withdrawal (EW)” policy for the Spring 2020 semester, the semester in which the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted face-to-face courses, forcing them to move fully online. Under this policy, students who earned a D, an F, or W (withdrawal) from a course had these transcript marks automatically transformed into an excused withdrawal (EW), a non-evaluative mark indicating the student withdrew from the course for reasons outside of their control. Thus, the course-level success data from 2019-2020 represent an anomaly because of the “compassionate EW” policy.

All Success Rate Table						
	Academic Year 2017 - 2018	Academic Year 2018 - 2019	Academic Year 2019 - 2020*	Academic Year 2020 - 2021	Academic Year 2021 - 2022	Academic Year 2022 - 2023
Department Success..	75.18%	75.21%	82.51%	74.57%	74.69%	75.97%
Total Enrollments	69,381	69,447	69,252	60,679	57,570	59,507



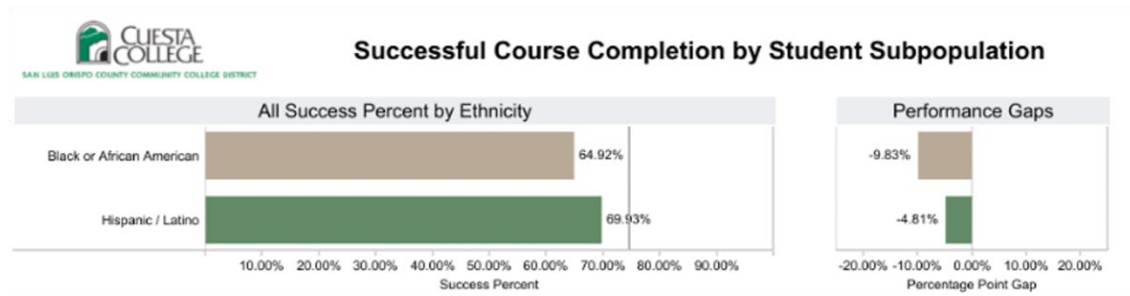
While compassionate EW played a role in course-level success data, the data also indicate how well the College responded to the challenges of the pandemic. In Fall 2019, most faculty had little experience teaching fully online courses; these faculty were forced to learn new skills and techniques remotely while teaching in a new modality. Despite a rapid and significant increase in the number of distance education (DE) sections, faculty teaching in a new modality, and students enrolled in DE courses, student success in DE has remained about the same pre- and post-COVID. In 2019-2020, there were 562 sections of DE courses with 16,695 students. In 2022-2023, 989 sections of DE courses were offered, with 26,944 students enrolled. The College invested significant resources – hiring additional DE trainers and mentors, creating the JEDI Academy (mentioned above), and purchasing software tools – to maintain a consistent level of student success during this rapid and potentially disruptive expansion of novel DE offerings.

2. How (i.e., for what subpopulations, modalities, etc.) does your institution disaggregate its assessment results? When you review disaggregated assessment results, what patterns or trends do you see related to equitable attainment of student learning? What patterns or trends excite you? What patterns or trends concern you?

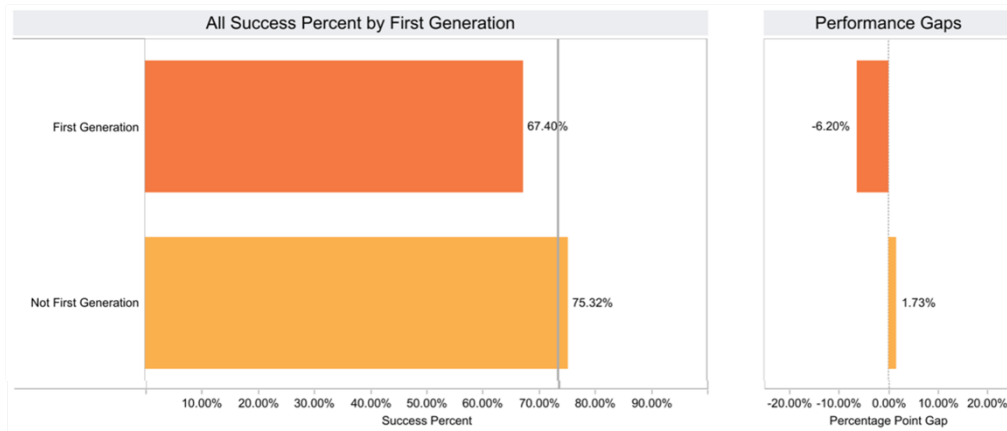
Currently, student learning outcome (SLO) data is not disaggregated due to limitations of our data compilation platform (eLumen); data can only be disaggregated at the program (PLO) and institutional (ILO) level. These higher-level data disaggregations are underutilized. Cuesta currently focuses on disaggregation of course-level student success data (rather than outcomes data) during the annual program review process.

College data is disaggregated by modality (DE vs face-to-face), financial aid status (eligibility for Pell or the CA College Promise Grant), and by the student demographic groups, specifically focusing on those disproportionately impacted (DI) groups mentioned in the most recent SEA Plan: Black/African American students, current or former foster youth, female students, first generation college students, and Latinx/Hispanic students. Additionally, the data associated with special student populations, such as justice-involved students (taking courses at the California Men’s Colony, a state prison), and special admit students (taking dual enrollment courses) have been disaggregated and evaluated separately.

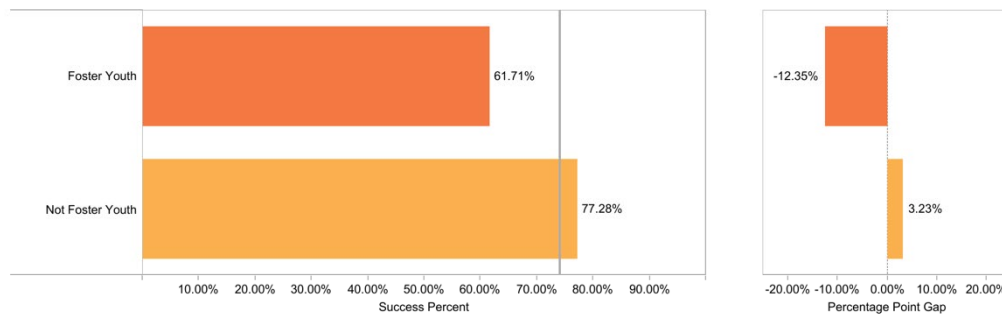
Despite overall increasing trends of student achievement, the equity gaps identified for the College’s DI groups grew during the pandemic. Reviewing the course-level success data from Fall 2016 to Spring 2020, the College identified a 5.92% equity gap for Black/African American students and a 3.81% equity gap for Latinx/Hispanic students. When compiling the success data for Fall 2021 to Spring 2023, as shown in Figure 2 (below), the equity gaps for these demographic groups have increased to 9.83% and 4.81%, respectively.



Between Fall 2016 and Spring 2020, the College measured a 4.92% equity gap in course success for first generation students when compared to non-first generation students. The success data between Fall 2021 and Spring 2023, reveal the equity gap for first generation students increased to 7.93%.



Finally, over Fall 2016 - Spring 2020, a 10.83% equity gap was identified for the course success of current and former foster youth. The success data for Fall 2021 - Spring 2023, show that the equity gap for current and former foster youth has increased to 15.58%.



3. What actions has your institution taken/is your institution taking in response to the patterns and trends discussed above? How will you monitor the results of these actions in order to inform future improvements and innovations in support of equitable student learning?

- **Increase Students' Sense of Belonging**
 - Cuesta is a Caring Campus: Cuesta has become a Caring Campus (as described above in A.1.). Caring Campus is comprised of the choosing and implementing at scale behaviors that contribute to a caring and welcoming campus aligned with Guided Pathways.
 - JEDI Training Component – Demystify: For students who are new to college, navigating enrollment and success in classes can be tough, especially those who do not have someone close to them to help them. Faculty learn and discuss pedagogical techniques to clarify course expectations during the JEDI Academy (described in A.1.).

- Student Celebration Events: Cuesta has held several events celebrating students from different demographics. For example, during the Fall 2023 semester, Cuesta College held a *First Generation College Celebration*. Banners with photographs of Cuesta students, faculty, and staff that are first-generation college students were hung near the Student Success Center and via displays, students were invited to share why they are “first-gen proud.”
- Student Space Upgrades and Changes: Spaces for students have become more student-centered. Several amenities have been added to the Student Success Centers on both campuses, including access to food, drinks, and ways to heat up food, and informal seating areas. A section of the library on the SLO Campus has been renovated to create a new Affinity Center (opening Fall 2024), providing students with a physical space to gather and connect.
- Area of Study (AoS) Canvas Hubs and Events: Students in meta-majors, our Areas of Study, are connected online in a Canvas hub where they can access resources, support, and one another. Area of Study events provide opportunities for connecting on campus with faculty and peers.
- **Keeping Costs Down and Providing More Funding For Students**
 - Implementation of badged open education resources (OER), low-cost book and materials and 0-textbook cost (ZTC) courses: With the implementation of Class Search, a new course search system, full identification of OER, ZTC, and low-cost materials courses on this system has been implemented. This helps students be able to select courses that are more affordable. Additionally, the faculty at Cuesta College are encouraged to use low- and no-cost materials, such as open-educ for their courses whenever possible. The transition to OER is supported via on-campus stipends to compensate faculty for their time.
 - Continuing The Cuesta Promise: A last dollar scholarship, the Cuesta Promise provides two years at Cuesta College fee-free to all graduates from San Luis Obispo County high schools. This includes alternative and adult school programs bringing a low cost of attendance option to all.
 - Dual Enrollment Opportunities: Cuesta College partners with all regional high schools offering a breadth of courses in career education and transfer pathways.
- **More Educational Options for Students**
 - Additional Opportunities for Distance Education (DE) Courses: As stated earlier, demand for distance education courses has increased. More faculty are finding ways to offer all or part of their courses online.
 - Courses across SLO county: Cuesta College plans to establish a District-operated location in the southern portion of the county to expand access to higher education in that region.
 - College Corps and Strong Workforce: Work experience and service opportunities for students are expanded and enhanced through these two statewide programs. The

paid experiences of College Corps provide students opportunity to experience the reward of service. The program enhancements, expanded facilities, and new equipment provided through the Strong Workforce Program funds have improved the career education opportunities of Cuesta College students.

- **Equity**

- Advancing Equity in Hiring: Cuesta's 2024 Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Plan incorporates strong equity practices into the hiring processes at the college. Additionally, EEO training is being expanded to include self-paced, asynchronous training for all employees serving on hiring screening committees.
- Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI): Cuesta has been working on embracing its HSI status so that the college is truly serving its Hispanic students rather than just simply enrolling them. The college has made several improvements, including adding information in Spanish to its website and directional signage, offering bilingual counselors, providing bilingual publications like the Commencement program, and planning for celebrations such as HSI Week.

The results of these actions will be monitored through careful review of data during each program's annual self-review. Events are evaluated with surveys.

D. Looking Ahead to the Next Self-Evaluation and Comprehensive Review

Provide a brief response to the question below. Suggested length for Section D is 2 pages.

Your institution will begin its next comprehensive self-evaluation in 1-2 years. What opportunities, changes, or other internal or external factors do you see on the horizon that are likely to affect the context of your self-evaluation and/or comprehensive peer review?

Cuesta College will continue the broad and varied effort to improve institutional outcomes leading into the next cycle of comprehensive institutional review. Five major factors influencing the particular focus areas of equity of student completion and transfer include the invitation to apply for the Aspen Prize, pursuit of a baccalaureate degree to meet regional workforce needs, expansion of educational opportunity in the southernmost portion of the service area, distance education as greater than 40% of course offerings, and the economy. These are complex factors with impacts that vary over time and in relation to the rise and wane of other internal and external factors.

Aspen Prize

In fall 2023, Cuesta College was selected to apply for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. The invitation was a recognition of the work underway at Cuesta College to improve equity of student success at scale. The application process required institutional reflection and analysis of data disaggregated across student demographics and support programs. This was a substantial reminder for Cuesta College of the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of implemented interventions to determine return on investment and from that consider means of expanding effective practices to rapidly reach scale. This will influence the assessment of current and future practices to support equity of student outcomes including case management intervention supports aligned with the Guided Pathways framework and the JEDI Academy on Curriculum and Teaching, a faculty professional development program emphasizing centering equity.

Baccalaureate Degree

Cuesta College has identified several needs in the region's workforce for baccalaureate degree holders. There is great sensitivity to the California Community College Baccalaureate Degree Program now established through legislation by neighboring Cal Poly, a California State University with a learn by doing philosophy and tradition of career education. Cuesta College is seeking partnership with Cal Poly to address the lack of transfer opportunities for local students resulting from the statewide mission and resultant lack of regional designation by the CSU. Referred to as an educational desert, the Central Coast has been assigned CSU Channel Islands as the local campus. Unfortunately, CSU Channel Islands is 147 miles from San Luis Obispo and more than 200 miles from the northern part of Cuesta's service area negatively impacting place bound students.

South County

In 1998, Cuesta College established the North County Campus in Paso Robles which serves the communities north of the Cuesta Grade. The Grade is a geologic barrier that separates the northern part of the district from the central and coastal areas. The North County Campus has the space, facilities, technology, and staffing to support current instructional needs and a significant increase of enrollment. The south portion of the service area has similar geographic barrier from the central area

of San Luis Obispo in the Shell Beach Straits. This narrow portion of Highway 101 is known for traffic snarls leading to lengthy delays particularly in the evening. For more than three decades, Cuesta College has partnered with Arroyo Grande High School and leased classroom space for evening instruction. The lease is restricted to the hours of 4:00 PM – 9:00 PM, has limited technology infrastructure, lacks parking, and is in a difficult to reach portion of the high school campus. The governing board of the San Luis Obispo County Community College District, Cuesta College, has prioritized establishing a South County educational site to expand access to higher education in the region. The new educational site will afford morning and afternoon class offerings supplemental to the existing evening schedule.

Distance Education

Cuesta College had a stable course schedule mix including 25% fully online offerings prior to the pandemic. Following the pandemic, the demand for fully online courses has hovered above 40% and now includes those subject areas that were previously thought to not be reasonable for online delivery. This shift represents the movement of about 180 course sections from physical classrooms into virtual spaces. It decreases the demand on our facilities and shifts our planning for faculty hiring. In support of the expanded online offerings, Cuesta College has become a Teaching College for the California Virtual Campus consortium and is now accessible to all California Community College students through streamlined course registration processes.

Dual Enrollment

The College offers dual enrollment through Career and College Access Pathways (CCAP) agreements at all local high schools, representing a growing source of enrollment. Indeed, San Luis Obispo County has the highest dual enrollment participation rate in the state with over 25% of high school students having taken a course from Cuesta College in 2021-2022. Dual enrollment in a student's chosen degree pathway is an identified action for Equitable Baccalaureate Degree Attainment in the CCCC's Vision 2030. Though current offerings are strong, the College must meet the challenge of better supporting students' degree pathways and closing racial and socioeconomic equity gaps to improve social and economic mobility.

Economy

Enrollment at Cuesta College never fully recovered following the great recession. In 2019/20, the college was at the highest enrollment rate since 2010, but still 2,000 full-time equivalent students below the peak. Cuesta College was early to implement a local Promise that provides two years fee free to local high school graduates and to offer CCAP at all local high schools. The college has pursued other non-traditional enrollment through noncredit programs for older adults, programs for justice impacted individuals, and short-term noncredit career education courses. These measures were and continue to be effective, but the shrinking number of high school graduates compounds the challenge. The unpredictable nature of the economy and how the California budget reflects the economic outlook amplify the challenge of meeting local demand when unemployment rises. The district reserves are solid at this time, but the outlook for the next two years suggests that the reserves will be necessary to maintain the current level of operations.